Muralists making their 'mark'

By BETTE BROWN

Celebration of Cinco de Mayo this week marks the independence of Mexico in 1860, when the French were ousted, and includes a wide variety of events in and around Watsonville.

At the Academia del Arte Chicano De Aztlan at 19 E. Lake Ave. Tuesday afternoon was Ralph D'Oliveira, an artist and university graduate who turned to murals a few months ago and with the other members of the "Tortuga Patrol" is leaving his colorful mark on numerous buildings in Watsonville.

Standing before an 8'x8' unfinished mural, he dabs, strokes, swashes and defines faces, figures, moods and symbols in the characteristic bold primary colors seen in Mexican art forms.

To achieve this effect, the gallery imports "*politec*," *a water based acrylic made in* Mexico. There is only one outlet in the United States for the paint.

"Ron Wheeler in San Francisco, to date, is the only importer of this paint. It is made especially for use on walls and costs $75 a gallon," D'Oliveira says, picking up quarts *of the deep toned paints. "See these are the* quart sizes in reds, greens, yellows, browns, and these range in price from $11 to $21 for some quarts."

Who and what is the "Tortuga Patrol?"

D'Oliveira laughed.

"*Tortuga means tortoise and the patrol is* made up of two artists from the academia and three promising high school artists," he said.

The use of the title "patrol" is to signify a group dedicated to communication within the city of the Mexican mural art form and its symbolism.

The murals are catching on fast. One by one, the scenes are appearing in restaurants, outside on supporting walls, and the latest is at the International Seniors Center where a jungle mural was created for the older viewers.

"Why a jungle scene?"

Again D'Oliveira laughs.

"No particular reason . . . or maybe because we want to show vitality," he says, carefully stroking the lines in a young girl's countenance in the mural.

The mural he is working on in the absence of his other painter colleagues, is a street scene. Against a skyscraper backdrop, in the foreground, are faces depicting a variety of insecure feelings while over the buildings hovers a deep purple winged angel of death.

The "Politec" used to create the originals is difficult at first to apply, the muralist said. "But, you learn to use it and how to *shade it.*"

The next mural is to be created for the Youth Employment Services. "I'm not sure of the design yet."

Usually he makes the rough drawing, but the others will make suggestions or will also sketch outlines. Then each takes a section of *the mural to work on. If the two experienced* artists believe a portion or aspect of the students' work can be improved upon or changed, suggestions are made.

Is there a problem trying to reach accord *on the mural theme?*

D'Oliveira shook his head. "No, we don't try come down hard on the students. They are talented and we simply try to have a fair exchange of ideas."

A mural will be seen in San Juan Bautista at the Teatro Campesina as part of a friendly exchange, he said.

Interested buyers may be surprised to learn that a mural may be commissioned at modest prices.

The formula is $3 a square foot with $1 per square foot going to the artist as an honorarium and the other $2 covering the equipment and supplies.

"However, this figure is subject to discussion since if we think the group is doing good for the community, we'll adjust our prices, or if we are permitted to design the mural, then it costs $1 a square foot less."

The gallery can be reached by going through the furniture store at 19 E. Lake Ave., or by driving to the rear and entering from the back of the gallery. There is no admission charge.

In celebration of Cinco de Mayo an exhibit of paintings, prints, photography and water-colors has been hung featuring local artists and four from Fresno.

One interesting original called "Enigma" took Daniel Ramirez of Freedom four months to complete and represents the first art work he has ever done.

Another street tableau with overtones of class conscious groupings is called "La Pendejada" and is by D'Oliveira.

Was it meant to be a social message?

Again the dark curly haired painter laughs. "Not necessarily. It simply came together and I ended up calling it 'La Pendejada' which means 'The Wild Life.'"

Staff artists and directors will participate *in Saturday's celebration of Cinco De Mayo* at the corner of Union and Riverside Streets where a program of music, poetry and theater will be presented. Handcrafts and food will be sold. The event starts at noon and is open to the public.

Acadamia artists include Carmen Leon, Alex Espinoza, Daniel de los Reyes, Clyde Cordero, Chris Coronel and Ray Romo.